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China's Evolving Nuclear Strategies (U)

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SPECIAL DEFENSE INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

CHINA'S EVOLVING NUCLEAR STRATEGIES (U)

(U) This estimate has been coordinated with the Service Intelligence Chiefs.

(U) The estimate examines the evolution of Chinese attitudes toward nuclear weapons and the likely impact on future strategic plans and policies. It addresses the political as well as military value that Beijing attaches to such weapons, and stresses the importance of this distinction in evaluating likely Chinese positions on strategic relations between the superpowers.

(U) The period covered by this estimate is the next ten years. Information available as of late April 1985 was considered in its preparation.

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SPECIAL DEFENSE INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

CHINA'S EVOLVING NUCLEAR STRATEGIES

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CHINA'S EVOLVING NUCLEAR STRATEGIES

KEY JUDGMENTS

[REDACTED] Improvements in Chinese strategic forces have been accompanied by major changes in China's foreign policy orientation and threat perception. Despite these changes China will continue to pursue a strategy of minimal deterrence.

- Based on production capacity, China has the capability to field a missile force significantly larger (several hundred intermediate-range and several dozen intercontinental-range missiles) than we project.
- Economic and strategic considerations, however, will lead Beijing to continue to rely on a relatively small force [REDACTED] composed primarily of intermediate-range systems.
- To maximize the survivability of this small force, China will continue to stress the use of mobility and a variety of camouflage, concealment, and deception measures.

[REDACTED] Beijing remains determined to build and maintain a balanced strategic force capable of deterring attack from any quarter. While changing threat perceptions have not resulted in a major reorientation in Chinese programs, deployment plans reflect a focus on the Soviet threat.

- The CSS-4 ICBM, originally envisioned by Beijing as providing a deterrent against the United States, now has a primary role for use against Soviet targets, especially Moscow.
- CSS-4 deployments in coming years will, nevertheless, also increase China's capability to potentially threaten the continental United States; some CSS-4s might have secondary targets in the United States.

[REDACTED] Beijing will continue, as it has for two decades, to portray its development of nuclear weapons as an undesirable but necessary defensive measure forced by the arms race of the superpowers. China's commitment to long-established positions--such as its no first-use pledge--will endure. The limited improvements likely in Chinese nuclear forces will reinforce, not alter, these basic policies.

[REDACTED] China's public commentary on nuclear issues reveals a growing appreciation of the US-USSR strategic relationship and its impact on Chinese security. Although Beijing will explore ways of improving relations with Moscow, it will continue to view the United States as an important strategic counterweight to the Soviet Union.

[REDACTED] While it recognizes the direct threat posed by Soviet strategic force improvements, China is also leery of the impact US programs

[REDACTED]

might have on its security. China's anxiety over US pursuit of a Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) will likely manifest itself on several levels. Beijing will be concerned:

- such plans will produce divisiveness within NATO that Moscow might play to its advantage;
- successful development of such a system might significantly lessen the value Washington attaches to China as a strategic counter to the USSR;
- SDI will spur new advances in missile defenses that will undermine the deterrent value of China's small missile force.

Chinese leaders realize that they will have very limited ability to directly influence superpower negotiations and decisions about future strategic programs. China will:

- attempt to indirectly influence these decisions using what leverage is provided within the broader political relationship being pursued with both the US and the USSR;
- shun bilateral arms control discussions but take an increasingly active part in international bodies such as the United Nations Conference on Disarmament.

China will publicly, but more often privately, give cautious support to US policy initiatives that further Beijing's objective of restraining improvements in the arsenals of the superpowers. It will remain vocal in its opposition to programs, such as SDI, that it believes potentially undermine its deterrent strategy. While no major technical challenge to the Soviet Union during the next ten years, Chinese force improvements will increase Moscow's uncertainty and concern over where Chinese strategic developments will ultimately lead.

DISCUSSION

1. [REDACTED] Since the early 1950s, several political and military factors have influenced, and will continue to influence, Beijing's nuclear planning. The development of Chinese strategic thinking has paralleled changes in the capabilities of Chinese forces, the relative strength of the two superpowers, and the status of Sino-Soviet and Sino-US relations. An examination of these factors will provide useful insights into the direction of future Chinese strategic doctrine.

THE ROOTS OF CHINA'S NUCLEAR STRATEGY

2. [REDACTED] China's slow but deliberate development of a nuclear weapons capability has been accompanied by concomitant evolution in its attitude toward, and understanding of, the impact that such weapons have on Chinese security. For some fifteen years after its founding, the People's Republic of China (PRC) had no independent nuclear capability. Although concerned with the possibility of nuclear weapons being used against it, first in the Korean War and then later during the Taiwan Strait Crisis, Beijing continued to publicly denigrate the impact of such weapons on warfare. This public attitude was at least partially designed to minimize domestic and foreign perception of an important weakness in Chinese security. It also reflected a Chinese belief, still prevalent today, that the political value of nuclear weapons will often be of greater importance than their actual military use which, devastating as it might be, remains unlikely except in extreme circumstances.

3. [REDACTED] Thus, in the later 1950s, Beijing believed that the USSR, having broken the US nuclear monopoly, should take a more active role in advancing socialist causes. China's disillusionment over Moscow's reluctance to play such a role was reinforced by Moscow's lack of support for Beijing during the 1958 Taiwan Strait Crisis. By this time Chinese leaders recognized that, whatever the relative political and military utility of nuclear weapons, China's possession of such weapons is essential to its national security.

4. [REDACTED] The initial deployments of Chinese nuclear forces began in the mid-1960s despite the earlier withdrawal of Soviet technical assistance. To this day we know very little about this fledgling Chinese force. What is clear, however, is that even then Beijing realized that the credibility and survivability of its very small, technologically unsophisticated force depends to a large extent on keeping details about its size and deployment from potential enemies. The pro-forma declarations that accompanied Chinese nuclear tests, beginning with the first in October 1964, sought to reinforce the political and military impact of China's possession of a nuclear capability while revealing little specific information about this capability.

| Test | Date |
|---------|-------------|
| CHIC 1 | 16 Oct 1964 |
| CHIC 2 | 14 May 1965 |
| CHIC 3 | 9 May 1966 |
| CHIC 4 | 27 Oct 1966 |
| CHIC 5 | 28 Dec 1966 |
| CHIC 6 | 17 Jun 1967 |
| CHIC 7 | 24 Dec 1967 |
| CHIC 8 | 27 Dec 1968 |
| CHIC 9 | 22 Sep 1969 |
| CHIC 10 | 29 Sep 1969 |
| CHIC 11 | 14 Oct 1970 |
| CHIC 12 | 18 Nov 1971 |
| CHIC 13 | 7 Jan 1972 |
| CHIC 14 | 18 Mar 1972 |
| CHIC 15 | 27 Jun 1973 |
| CHIC 16 | 17 Jun 1974 |
| CHIC 17 | 27 Oct 1975 |
| CHIC 18 | 23 Jan 1976 |
| CHIC 19 | 26 Sep 1976 |
| CHIC 20 | 17 Oct 1976 |
| CHIC 21 | 17 Nov 1976 |
| CHIC 22 | 17 Sep 1977 |
| CHIC 23 | 15 Mar 1978 |
| CHIC 24 | 14 Oct 1978 |
| CHIC 25 | 14 Dec 1978 |
| CHIC 26 | 16 Oct 1980 |
| CHIC 27 | 5 Oct 1982 |
| CHIC 28 | 4 May 1983 |
| CHIC 29 | 6 Oct 1983 |
| CHIC 30 | 3 Oct 1984 |
| CHIC 31 | 19 Dec 1984 |

Figure 1. (U) Chinese Nuclear Tests.

[REDACTED]

6. [REDACTED] Before the mid-1970s, Beijing's public commentary on nuclear weapons revealed little new information about Chinese nuclear doctrine, strategy, or policies. As a nuclear power, China stated that its sole purpose in developing such weapons was for self-defense and to "oppose the nuclear monopoly of the superpowers." With each Chinese nuclear test, Beijing repeated its declaration that "at no time and in no circumstances will China be the first to use nuclear weapons." Chinese leaders claimed that, although they conducted necessary and limited nuclear tests, their ultimate goal was to work with the peoples of the world to achieve the total prohibition and destruction of nuclear weapons. These fundamental statements of principle continue to provide the basic framework for Chinese positions on nuclear issues.

CHINESE FORCES MATURE

7. [REDACTED] During the 1970s Chinese nuclear forces began to reach their maturity. Deployments of the CSS-2 intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM), which had reached initial operational capability (IOC) in 1970 occurred throughout these years. With a range of 2,800 km, this missile significantly extended China's regional strike capability. It remains the backbone of China's strategic missile force.

Although a limited range ICBM, the CSS-3 provided an important new capability: it was the first Chinese missile capable of reaching targets in the Western USSR, including Moscow.

TRENDS AND PROSPECTS

10. [REDACTED] These force developments have occurred during a period of significant change in Chinese foreign policy orientation and threat perception. Improvement in the Sino-US relationship continues to offer Beijing new opportunities for dealing with the Soviet threat which, if not immediate, is now China's primary security concern. Whether these changes have had any appreciable impact on Chinese missile development plans and strategic doctrine remains unclear.

11. [REDACTED] Strategy and Deployment Plans. Given its production capacity, China has the capability to field a significantly larger force--on the order of several hundred MRBMs and IRBMs. Economic and strategic considerations, however, have led Beijing to continue to pursue a strategy of minimal deterrence. China almost certainly will continue to rely on small numbers of missiles, deployed in a manner designed to maximize their survivability, to provide the retaliatory capability central to its deterrent strategy.

[REDACTED]

12. [REDACTED] Beijing remains determined to build a balanced force capable of deterring attack from any quarter. Although there has been no

[REDACTED]

major reorientation in China's strategic programs corresponding to the fluctuations in its foreign policy, there has been a focus on the Soviet threat. This is perhaps best reflected in the developmental program of the CSS-4.

13. [REDACTED] Beijing undoubtedly first envisioned the CSS-4 as playing a major role in establishing a deterrent against the United States. Although significant changes have occurred in the international environment since the CSS-4 was first conceived in the 1960s, Beijing probably still considers the establishment of a balanced strategic capability essential to its achieving recognition as a world power capable of independent action. CSS-4 deployments in the next few years will, in fact, increase China's capability to potentially threaten targets in the continental United States. Nevertheless, for the foreseeable future, the operational mission of the CSS-4 will be primarily associated with China's deterrent strategy against the USSR. The CSS-4 flight test program and other information we have on this missile suggest that it is intended to be used against targets defended by an unsophisticated, first generation anti-ballistic missile defense. Moscow remains the only city with an ABM system.

[REDACTED]

14. [REDACTED] Beijing's past reticence to publicly discuss nuclear issues, particularly Chinese force capabilities, continues to diminish. An increasing number of newspaper and magazine articles are providing brief, but useful glimpses of China's deployed forces. Chinese leadership statements concerning nuclear policies, while still somewhat guarded, are by no means rare. Such open discussion seeks to present China as a responsible nuclear power while demonstrating both its capability and determination to respond to any Soviet nuclear attack.

15. [REDACTED] Particularly noteworthy is the concern exhibited by some writers over the dilemma that would face Chinese leaders if the Soviet Union were to limit its use of nuclear weapons in any attack. Chinese nuclear strategy, as it is now focused on the Soviet Union, is predicated upon deterring attack by maintaining a small but credible capability to retaliate against Soviet urban-industrial areas. Existing forces provide Chinese leaders little flexibility for other targeting options. Recognizing the great disparity between Chinese and Soviet capabilities, some Chinese military writers have argued the need

[REDACTED]

for more options--both tactical and theater--below the strategic level to respond to a limited Soviet attack.

16 [REDACTED]

There are indications that the Chinese, having recognized this as a weakness in their strategy, are pursuing a variety of programs aimed at developing shorter-range ballistic missiles and other tactical systems more suited to battlefield use. When they reach fruition in the 1990s, such systems may have a major impact on Chinese strategy, particularly employment plans.

17. The Strategic View From Beijing. As they have for more than twenty years, Chinese policy statements on nuclear issues remain primarily general declarations of principle. We expect Beijing to continue to portray its development of nuclear weapons as an undesirable but necessary measure forced upon China by the continued arms race between the US and USSR. The improvements in Chinese nuclear forces likely to occur over the next ten years will tend to reinforce, not alter, these basic policies. China's commitment to well-established positions--such as its no first-use pledge--will endure not only because of the political advantage Beijing might feel they offer but because they will remain compatible with the limited capabilities and strategic objectives of China's small force.

18. Beijing's public discussion of nuclear issues reveals both a growing appreciation of the complexity of the US-USSR strategic relationship and its impact on China's security and Beijing's growing confidence in its nuclear forces. We believe Chinese rhetorical analyses, which on the surface continue to point to "superpower contention" as the principal threat to world peace, reflect deeper Chinese sensitivities. Beijing has for some time been concerned about both the political and military implications for China of Soviet military advances. Although it now shies away from public calls, prevalent in the late-1970s, for a united front against Moscow, Beijing continues to view the United States as an important counterweight to the Soviet Union.

19. Recognizing the direct threat to China posed by improvements in Soviet strategic capabilities, Beijing is, nonetheless, leery of the indirect impact the US programs can also have on Chinese security interests. This concern is perhaps best reflected in the positions being taken by China on US and Soviet intermediate-range missile deployments and on Washington's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI).

20. Beijing's assessment of the near-term significance of US and Soviet force developments are largely politically oriented. Chinese spokesmen contend that despite the recent deployments by both sides, US and Soviet nuclear forces remain roughly equivalent. Beijing has condemned SS-20

[REDACTED]

deployments in Asia as a threat to China and Japan as well as to US forces, but tends to downplay the actual military significance of the deployments. In the context of superpower relations, China portrays Soviet deployments as primarily an attempt by Moscow to fracture NATO. Having successfully responded to this challenge, the United States can, in Beijing's eyes, accrue political and psychological gains in the world arena by forgoing unnecessary additional deployments.

21. [REDACTED] Interestingly, these views have come primarily from arms control specialists in China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and from civilian research academies. The extent to which they are shared within China's military establishment remains unknown. We have been unable to identify which, if any, military elements are responsible for evaluating US and Soviet strategic programs in terms of the potential impact on future Chinese strategy and forces. Chinese penchant for security partially explains this gap, but it also appears that Chinese strategic analysis remains at a relatively rudimentary stage suffering from the effects of fragmented bureaucracies with overlapping responsibilities. Steps being taken to improve the organizational setting in which this analysis is conducted will continue in the coming years. How, and where, differing civilian and military bureaucratic concerns will be melded into new policy approaches is less clear.

22. [REDACTED] What is already clear, however, is the growing anxiety of both civilian and military leaders over US plans for pursuing a ballistic missile defense system. This concern will likely manifest itself on a number of levels. As in the case of INF deployments, Beijing is concerned that SDI plans will produce divisiveness within NATO that Moscow could play to its advantage. A somewhat less likely possibility, but nonetheless real concern of Beijing over the longer term, is that Washington's successful development of a defensive system against Soviet missiles could significantly lessen the value attached by the United States to China as a strategic counter to the USSR. Maintaining a meaningful, but independent, position in the US-China-USSR strategic relationship will remain a fundamental goal of Beijing. In the wake of a successful SDI program, China might find itself in the uncomfortable position of being either dependent upon the United States for security guarantees or left vulnerable to the USSR.

23. [REDACTED] A more direct problem that SDI might pose to Chinese leaders lies in its possible impact on China's nuclear deterrent. Beijing remains confident in its ability [REDACTED] to continue to ensure that at least a portion of its small force will survive any enemy first strike, despite significant improvements in Soviet and US systems. Of increasing concern, however, will be the potential impact of ballistic missile defense technology on a small Chinese force whose effectiveness will continue to depend to a large extent upon its capability to credibly threaten retaliation against enemy urban-industrial areas.

24. [REDACTED] Beijing's concern is reflected in the efforts already taken to improve the capability of the CSS-4 ICBM to penetrate first generation ABM defenses. Additional improvements will be made to this and to other new systems that will be deployed in the next ten years, but Chinese leaders are undoubtedly concerned about their ability to stay abreast of the technology that might be

[REDACTED]

required. Even a partially successful SDI program, and the inevitable Soviet research efforts it will spur, would pose a major new challenge to China's defense establishment.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SOVIET UNION AND UNITED STATES

25. [REDACTED] Chinese leaders realize that they will continue to have only limited ability to influence the negotiations and decisions of the superpowers concerning future strategic weapons programs and deployments. Beijing will attempt to indirectly influence these programs that affect Chinese security by utilizing what leverage might be offered within the broader political relationship it is pursuing with both the USSR and the United States. China will continue to steadfastly deny the relevance of its own nuclear force to any arms control efforts prior to large reduction in the arsenals of the superpowers. While it shuns bilateral arms control discussions, Beijing has shown an increased willingness to participate in those international organizations addressing disarmament issues. China will likely become an even more active participant in such bodies as the Conference on Disarmament with Chinese spokesmen presenting positions independent of those of the superpowers. These positions will, depending on the particular issue involved, vary in the degree of support or opposition they provide to those of the US and USSR.

26. [REDACTED] Soviet Union. Chinese qualitative force improvements--particularly the deployment of a more mobile and more survivable solid-propellant MRBM--will further complicate Soviet planning but will not appreciably increase the threat this force poses to Moscow. Systems modifications, including those made to the CSS-4 ICSM to improve its capability to penetrate ABM defenses, will be unlikely to seriously alter the large discrepancy between relative Chinese and Soviet force capabilities. Of more concern to Moscow will be the long term implications of such improvements, particularly where Chinese force developments will ultimately lead Beijing.

27. [REDACTED] Development of tactical nuclear capabilities will provide Chinese leaders with new options should they be faced with Soviet aggression, but even with these added capabilities, Chinese forces will remain ill-prepared to conduct extensive operations on the nuclear battlefield. Such improvements will, however, contribute to China's deterrent strategy. They will increase the risks and potential costs to Moscow of any military attack against China.

28. [REDACTED] Chinese disarmament policies on the other hand, while generally critical of both the USSR and United States, will at times be potentially useful to Moscow. Beijing's call for a universal no first-use declaration by all nuclear powers and its vocal opposition to any spaced-based weapons--defensive and offensive--will be publicly more attuned to Moscow's than to Washington's interests.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] As such, they will support China's attempt to insulate itself from Soviet pressure.

30. [REDACTED] In the policy arena, China will publicly, but more often privately, give cautious support to those US strategic policy initiatives that further Beijing's primary interest in restraining quantitative and qualitative improvements in the arsenals of the superpowers. China will be vocal in its opposition to US policies and actions, such as SDI, that it believes potentially undermine China's deterrent strategies.